Christopher Hall

A Topic

Sitting, hard impossibly uncomfortable deskchair, struggling to figure out my new professor. Some of the other students in this class have studied with her before and I feel like an outsider. Perhaps, I made a mistake even though I really want this class. This stupid deskchair is so uncomfortable. The torturous individual that decided to buy these middle school sized things should be forced to use them all day. Damn with all of the writing classes this semester when will I have a life. I am so glad we can use our computes in this class, I am so slow at hand writing. Huh, oh an in class journal writing. I like writing and I usually get good ideas when I do journals so cool. So she will pass out the topics when we do these, that is good to know. “Five separate incidents that somehow seem related,” that is an interesting one. I think I know what to do, how I am sitting here.

-Oct 2006-

“This should really make things so much easier,” I said “gas will cut in half.” My wife Heather and I had just finished unloading boxes out of our car. We had cut a comical sight driving down highway 65 with an old wooden dining room table strapped to the roof. The legs pointed up toward the sky as it crowned our silver Chevy Cavalier, its companion chairs hung out of the trunk. Heather was working two jobs, both were still in Clinton and with her classes it made moving difficult. Luckily we did not have that much to move. In the year and a half that we had been married, we still did not even have a bed. “Imagine no more driving 65 miles just getting to class,” I said. Moving to Morrilton seemed like a common sense move.

The town was only about 25 minutes away from the college and we still had someplace to go relax. Both Heather and I enjoyed the outdoors and with Petit Jean Mountain only a few miles away this place was perfect. The apartments were old government apartments mostly for the old and the disabled. With the small amount that we were making, we qualified for the ‘projects’ cause. When we opened the apartment door and saw the yellow, once white, walls stained from years of nicotine and tar, the project cause was still a hard sell for us. “How are we going to set up the rooms?” Heather asks. We had no couch or chairs, no tv or computer, all we had was a stereo, a dining room set from a pawnshop and our kayaks. We threw our pile of blankets on the floor in the bedroom (for a sleeping pallet) and put the table in the dining area. We figured out the best place for the kayaks were in the bedroom because the screens opened up and they would just slide right in and out of the window.

-June 2005-

Our elopement seemed to be a success. I didn’t think Heather’s parents would ever speak to her again. After a month of marriage, we were starting to settle in nicely in north central Arkansas. “We can stay here and help Pat and Judy for about six months then go home right?” asks Heather. I respond “That is my plan we can just get away from everyone.” We moved up to Dennard Arkansas to get away from everybody that wanted to help and give advice on what to do and how to be married. We moved up to Dennard to get a start on our own, to see if we could accomplish us. We moved up to Dennard because my close friends asked if I wanted to move into their two story, four bedroom, two bathroom all wood cabin on top of a mountain in the Ozarks and help set up a goat farm for their retirement.

I knew a lot about animals and they didn’t, it seemed a good match, we get the top floor to ourselves. The area was beautiful, forty acres with a large spring fed creek at least one hundred foot deep. Most of the property was all forested with large house sized boulders and even a dream like historical Indian cave. The cabin had no a/c, the water was pumped from the underground spring. The owners lived in Houston Texas and only came up once every couple of months. During the summer if it became too hot we would just walk over to the cave which was always in the sixty’s inside.

After a few months, Heather started missing playing in an orchestra. She had been a musician for years and that was one of her weaknesses. We found an orchestra in Conway at UCA. After a semester of playing she decided she would go to school but man what a drive.

-Spring 2004-

Ron (my business partner) sat at his computer and drank more rum (like usual) as I was made pieces for the next show. Ron seemed to be addicted to the computer. That is all he ever did anymore was sit there and try to get dates, telling them what he thought would get him someplace. I never understood that path to dating, if you build yourself up like that after the first date all you can do is fall. Watching him do this day after day had become a pass time for me. Making chainmaille was so second nature I don’t even have to look at my hands, all I do is follow the picture in my head.

I was preparing my stock for the next show. My seizures had gotten to the point where I now could not function. This was quickly turning into one of the worst years of my life. Around every 2 wks or so my mind would take my body and painfully turn it into a drooling idiot for a couple of hours. My phone rang earlier that day and it was another doctor telling me they could not tell me why I was having all these problems and after one hundred thousand dollars in debt from all the hospitals and ERs there should be something.

After Ron went into his stinking room and I was still sitting on the couch the overwhelming feeling of what the fuck is the point set in. I knew I had a way to find out. There was a bottle of Xanax, morphine and Vicodin in my bag, they worked wonders for my headaches. I grabbed the whole bottle and started taking them with bourbon. They became candy. Soon 10 Morphine tabs gone, then 8 Xanax and finally a whole handful of Vicodin downed with the smokey woody beverage. I was drank over a fifth of bourbon then went and lay down and started to read a book. I don’t remember anything else. About 30 hrs later I woke up still on my bed vomiting all over the place. I was so sick I could not see, but I did not have a seizure.

A week or so later when the show started Heather came over to say hello. I had known her for years but she was always so young, she wasn’t that young anylonger.

-Spring of 1997-

My roommate Mike was telling me how much I need to try and sell my stuff at faire. His wording was, “Don’t be a pussy, go ask and see if someone will let you sell it out there.” That weekend was the start of the renaissance festival and we had season tickets. Our plan was to go at least one day each of the eight weekends. Both of us enjoyed the alcohol and looking at all the scantily clad women. I told him, “I will put a few things in the car just in case something happens.” I had been selling a few things at head shops and outdoor markets so I had a couple of pieces made.

We took his car, the unkillable 92’ Ford Probe, and on opening day of the faire arrived to a beautiful day. Eighty degrees and no rain what better could you ask for spring. As we pulled into the festival parking lot we were directed to an outlying parking spot. It seemed the Scarborough Faire was going to be full today. The lines to get in were long, people were standing impatiently some dressed in their best costumes that probably took years to make. We took our bright and shiny new season passes to the shortest line, for pass holders only. This line was mostly all costumed people so Mike and I kind of stood out in our regular street clothes.

As we walked through the gates the usual sound of music greeted us. The tin whistles and fiddles kept in time by a Bodhran’s hypnotic spell instantly pulled us out of the 1990s. Walking into the reenacted 1500s village Mike again pushed, “ So are you going to puss out or will you try to sell something here?” “Fuck off man I am going to the armoury,” I responded. We walked straight ahead across a large field full of gawking people, as they stared around them at all the excitement. Kids ran happy barefooted on the grass and adults let their imagination come out. We continued to the edge of the field until we saw a two story building with beautiful coal smoke flowing out the top of a chimney. The building had the Italian colors on a banner wrapped on the bottom of the second story. It had a small spiral black spiral staircase next to the lit forge and a porch for sitting above the work area.

We walked inside of the building and instantly were assaulted by armour and swords hanging all over the walls. I looked toward the forge and saw the owner of the shop with another sootie person working on a piece of metal. I walked over to the counter while Mike was checking out some of the pieces. The owners name happened to also be Mike and he came over to me and asked, “ Good Morrow, how can be of service?” I went through a spiel and told him how many years experience I had been making chainmaille and that he did not have any in his shop. I went on to tell him about the amount of armour that he makes without any chain reinforcement and I thought it would look better with it. I could not believe my ears when he said, “ Why don’t you bring me some to look at.” I look over at Maddog (a nickname my roommate had picked up in the army) he smiled and tossed me the keys.

-Spring of 1991-

“Come on Chris you will love it.” My friend Randy pleaded. I really did not see the point of going to a place and spending money to watch a bunch of people dressed up and speaking in fake accents. “They have music and great shows,” he said. Not a way to get an eighteen year old interested. Randy was in his 30s and had never even moved out of his mother’s house. I didn’t think he had been on a real date yet. I knew Randy was worried about me, as were all my friends, it had been three months since my father’s suicide and I still didn’t care about connecting with people yet. He was trying to get me to go the Renaissance fair south of Dallas. “They have chainmaille artists and bladesmiths,” he coaxed.

For two years I had been learning to make chainmaille. I had seen a picture on TV once when I was about 15 and tried to make the pattern in the picture. All I had available was old baling wire and a large 3/8 rusty nail to wrap it around to make rings. I twisted the rusted old wire around the nail and made a wavy, out of shape spring then grabbed a pair of tin snips and cut it in to rings. Using pliers I put the rings into their correct places and had a little square poorly made piece of pride.

After two years of practice and study on the art, I still had never seen a finished piece other than my own crude attempt. Randy telling me this fair had chainmaille had been the deal breaker. We went that weekend.

Driving south, it was a sixty mile drive to Dallas, then a thirty mile drive to the fair. We exited the highway in Waxahachie and came over a hill. I saw a long line of cars going into a cow field. We followed the other cars and parked in a grass parking where an attendant pointed for us to go. I got out of the car and looked around. The other people were all dressed in costumes. Ladies in fine dresses, peasants in rags, swords, suits of armor all around me in this Texas cow pasture. Randy now had the glowing face of a ten year old at Christmas. I was not too sure about this, it seemed strange. The people around us were all hurrying toward a mock castle façade with portcullises as gates to get inside.

I Followed Randy and make it through the line and into the fair. I was in awe. People everywhere were wearing armor and jewelry like I am trying to make. Seeing chainmail shirts and belts along with the jewelry that could be made from the little rings inspired me, cheered me, and brought me back into the light of inspiration. I knew where I wanted to be every spring and what I wanted to be doing.